DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 351 CG 021 966

AUTHOR Boyd, Vivian; And Others
TITLE Requiring Students in Freshman English To Participate in Retention-Related Activities. Research Report #14-89.
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 9p.; Prepared by the Counseling Center Retention Study Group.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Freshmen; Extracurricular Activities; Higher Education; *Intervention; Mentors; Required Courses; *School Holding Power; Skill Development; Teacher Student Relationship; Tutors

ABSTRACT

In response to the goal of improving college student retention, it was decided to require students in a freshman English course to participate in activities associated with academic persistence. Students (N=43) selected 3 of 4 retention-related activities in which to participate and recorded their experiences briefly in their course journals. Activities included getting to know a professor outside the classroom setting; experiencing the value of a tutor; experiencing the value of campus leisure activities; and improvement of educational skills. Students (N=41) enrolled in different sections of the course comprised the comparison group. There were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and comparison groups on their rates of either subsequent registration or of their retention in good standing. The results may have been confounded by the approach of the two teaching assistants collaborating in the intervention; one of the teaching assistants was not clear in her instructions and expectations. The most popular retention-related activity was getting to know a professor outside the classroom. Future course-required retention-related activities should be aimed at assisting first-year students' access to academic models and potential mentors. (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED311351

COUNSELING CENTER

Office of Vice President for Student Affairs

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

College Park, Maryland

CG 021966

Requiring Students in Freshman English
to Participate in Retention-related Activities

Research Report #14-89

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

* Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt,
Stanley Hunt, Thomas Magoon, Jean McDevitt

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Vivian Boyd

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

COUNSELING CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

Requiring Students in Freshman English to Participate in Retention-related Activities

Research Report #14-89

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

* Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Thomas Magoon, Jean McDevitt

Computer time for this project has been provided in full through the Computer Science Center of The University of Maryland College Park

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Requiring Students in Freshman English to Participate in Retention-related Activities

The Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

Summary

Forty-three students enrolled in a required freshman English course (Introduction to Writing) were required by their teaching assistant (TA) to select three of four retention-related activities in which to participate and record their experiences briefly in their course journals. Forty-one students enrolled in different sections of the course comprised the comparison group. There were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and comparison groups on their rates either of subsequent registration or of their retention in good standing. The results may have been confounded by an inconsistency in the approach of the two TAs collaborating in the intervention; whereas one was clear in her instructions and expectation, the other was not. The most popular retention-related activity was getting to know a professor outside the classroom. Future course-required retention-related activities should be aimed at assisting first year students' access to academic models and potential mentors.

* Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Thomas Magoon, Jean McDevitt

Requiring Students in Freshman English to Participate in Retention-related Activities

Counseling Center Retention Study Group*

In response to the goal of improving retention at The University of Maryland College Park, the Counseling Center's Retention Study Group (RSG) has been exploring ways to enhance the likelihood of University students remaining enrolled until graduation. RSG identified four activity areas which retention literature suggests are positively associated with academic persistence:

1. getting to know a professor outside the classroom setting
2. experiencing the value of a tutor
3. experiencing the value of campus leisure activities
4. improvement of educational skills

It was decided to go beyond taking a proactive stance by advising students to take part in these activities, and to require students to select three of the four activities as part of their class assignment in a required freshman English course, and to record their experiences briefly in their journals.

METHOD

Introduction to Writing: English 101, or exemption, is required for all entering freshmen and as such was an ideal course through which to implement the intervention. Two teaching assistants (TAs), teaching two sections each of English 101 agreed to collaborate. During the third week of the Spring 1987 semester, each TA introduced the intervention

* Vivian Boyd, Steven Carstens, Patricia Hunt, Stanley Hunt, Thomas Magoon, Jean McDevitt

to one of their two sections (the other being a designated comparison group). Students in the treatment sections were told that they could select which three activities they preferred to follow through on, and they would be expected to record their experiences in their journals.

Outcome Variables

Two outcome variables were studied to determine the effect of the intervention on subjects' retention rates:

(1) academic retention, defined as being enrolled for a given semester;

(2) academic retention in good standing, defined as being enrolled for a given semester and entering that semester with no academic action taken as the result of the previous semester.

All data concerning registration status and academic action were obtained from University records. Data were analyzed for four semesters subsequent to the semester of intervention.

RESULTS

Forty-three students were included in the experimental group; 41 students were in the comparison group.

Table 1 shows academic retention rates of the two groups for four subsequent semesters.

Table 1.

Academic Retention Rates by Group

	Group				
	Experimental		Comparison		
Semester	n	%	n	%	p
initial n	43		41		
F '87	36	84	34	83	ns
S '88	33	77	33	80	ns
F '88	30	70	30	73	ns
S '89	29	67	29	71	ns

Table 2 shows rates of academic retention in good standing by group.

Table 2.

Academic Persistence in Good Standing by Group

	Group				
	Treatment		Comparison		
Semester	n	%	n	%	p
initial n	43		41		
F '87	31	72	26	63	ns
S '88	30	70	26	63	ns
F '88	29	67	27	66	ns
S '89	26	60	26	63	ns

DISCUSSION

The results of this retention intervention were statistically nonsignificant at the .05 level, using the chi square statistic. On the surface, it would seem that requiring students to participate in activities which the

retention literature suggests are related to retention does not have a powerful enough effect to impact retention rates. However, there was inconsistency between the approach of the two TAs toward this intervention; whereas one TA was clear in her instructions and expectations, the other was less so.

The results are further confounded by the fact that students who were registered for a required freshman English course during the spring semester participated in this intervention. Such registrants may have received poor (or no) advising, or they may have been taking the course a second time, having failed it the first time. It could also mean that fall sections of the course were closed out before the students registered. If either case is true, these particular students may not be representative of the freshman class as a whole.

Two things are suggested by these results. First, students who register for spring sections of a course required of all freshmen whose test scores do not exempt them may need a more powerful intervention than the one described above, where one visiti to the selected activities satisfied the requirement. Second, to test the hypothesis that students who register for fall sections of freshman English are qualitatively different from those who register for spring sections, the intervention needs to be replicated with students who are registered for fall sections of freshman English. Attention should be given to the commitment of the TAs to being clear about both the instructions and their

expectations concerning the intervention.

The least selected of the four retention-related activities was joining a campus leisure activity. The most selected activity was getting to know a professor outside the classroom. Of particular interest was the more enthusiastic TA's observation that her students' attitude and journal writing energy were most positively stimulated by the activity of getting to know personally one of their faculty. Many students reported that being required to take the initiative made it easier for them to do so, and that they enjoyed the interaction far more than they had expected to.

Future interventions should be aimed at assisting the first year student's access to academic models and potential mentors.